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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Ma, E. (., Duan, B., Shu, L. (., & Arcodia, C. (2017). Chinese visitors at Australia wineries: Preferences, motivations, and barriers. *Journal of Tourism, Heritage & Services Marketing*, 3(1), 3-8. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.41062>

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Chinese visitors at Australia wineries: Preferences, motivations, and barriers

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Abstract: China has become Australia's most important source market and there are growing number of visitors participated in wine tourism. Using in-depth interviews, the study looked into Chinese tourists' preferences, motivations and barriers to participate in wineries tours in Australia. The study enriched to literature on wine tourism. It offered practical implications for wineries and destinations to better understand and accommodate Chinese wine tourists' needs and preferences.

Keywords: Wine Tourism, Chinese Visitors, Preferences, Motivations, Barriers

JEL Classification: L83, M1, O1

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1 INTRODUCTION

Wine tourism has been studied and characterized as a form of cultural tourism and a type of special-interest tourism (Charters and Ali-Knight, 2002; Frochot, 2000). Wine tourism refers to tourists visiting vineyards with the primary purpose of tasting or experiencing wine and wine related activities (Hall et al., 2002). Wine tourism is value-adding because it integrates grape growing, wine making, cellar door sales, food and beverage, accommodation and tours and forms a complete set of tourism experiences (Carlson & Dowling, 2001). Australia has more than two thousand wine businesses and the wine industry generates more than four billion revenue every year (Australia Bureau of Statistics, 2012). Wine tourism plays a vital role for Australian wineries, whose sales are largely dependent on visitors and

cellar door sales (Pratt & Sparks, 2014). Despite the popularity of wines, wine tourism with international visitors has been slow (Tourism Research Australia, 2013).

China has become Australia's second largest market for tourist arrivals and ranked first in terms of total expenditure (Tourism Australia, 2014). Chinese visitors are seeking a wider range of tourism experiences and wine tourism is progressively popular among Chinese tourists (Edgar, 2014). This creates an avenue for the growth of the Australian wine tourism sector. The market is huge and has great potential to grow because of the following reasons. First of all, China has become the top six wine-consuming countries and wine consumption in China is expected to grow at a rate that is seven-time of the global average (Qiu et al., 2013). Second, Chinese people recognize health benefits of wine (Qiu et al., 2013). Third, Chinese people consider wine drinking as an

indication of higher education levels and social status (Liu & Murphy, 2007), therefore, most Chinese tourists consider wine, particularly foreign wines as a suitable gift option for social purpose.

Wine tourism is an emerging field of study in the tourism marketing literature. As an emerging field of study, Chinese travellers' wine tourism experiences have not received enough attention in Australian contexts (Qiu et al., 2013; Camillo, 2012). This has left important research gaps (Carlsen & Dowling, 2001). Given the growing importance of the Chinese market to Australian tourism industry, it is time to pay more attention to Chinese travellers' wine tourism experience in Australia. This study aims to explore and understand Chinese tourists' perception toward the wine tourism experience in Australia. Specifically, the study will explore Chinese visitors' preferences, motivations and major barriers of participating in wine tourism. The study will make significant theoretical contribution in the wine tourism and consumer behaviour literature. Moreover, the findings of the study can offer empirical recommendations to Australia's wine industry and tourism industry to better accommodate Chinese wine tourists' need.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Wine and wine tourism in China - past and present

The history of wine in China can trace back to more than two thousand years ago (Duan, Arcodia, & Ma). The first modern wine factory was set up in the late 19th century and in a bit over one century's time, China has become the 8th wine production country in the world. China is also the 5th largest wine consumption country and ranked 4th in wine importing (Vinexpo, 2015). Red wine comprised more than 90% of wines consumed in China. French is the largest wine importing countries to China (14,500,000 boxes), followed by Australia (4,100,000 boxes). China has been the fastest growing exporting market for Australian wine for the past 10 years, accounting about 5.4% of the total revenue of Australian wine industry. However, the per capita wine consumption in China is only 1/4 of the world average, suggesting great growing potential in this market (Penfold, Wei, & Ladkin, 2012).

Several factors, such as economic growth, female consumers' contribution and positive image of wine, contribute to the popularity of foreign wines in China. Specifically, China's continued strong economic growth has led to the rise of China's middle class, who can afford foreign-branded alcoholic beverages (Pingali, 2011). More women have joined the working places and they often prefer wines over other alcoholic drinks, which accounts for an important component of the wine market. The popularity of pub culture in China has offered more opportunities for Chinese consumers to drink foreign wines. Given above reasons and with the popularity of tourism among Chinese people, wine tourism, as a form of special interest tourism started to emerge in China.

2.2 Chinese visitors to Australia and the wine tourism segment

China is Australia's second largest inbound market in terms of visitor arrivals (7.18 million for the year ending August 2015) and ranked first in terms of total expenditure (Tourism Australia, 2014). Chinese visitors are seeking a wider range of tourism experiences and wine tourism has recently become popular (Edgar, 2014). Despite positive attitude toward foreign wines, the majority of Chinese consumers have limited knowledge about wine. Given the historical dominating status of European wines, researchers suggest that most Chinese consumers consider that best wines are produced in Europe (Qiu et al., 2013). In 2013, 5.1 million overnight food and wine visitors travelled to Australia and 14% (232,600) of them were Chinese (Tourism Australia, 2014). Wineries provide ideal contexts for Chinese visitors to experience and learn about Australian wines. It can also provide opportunities to understand Chinese visitors' preferences and experiences with wine tourism, which is critically important in developing this market, because current only 4% of Chinese travellers in Australia visited wineries (Tourism Australia, 2014). This suggests great potential to promote Australian wines to Chinese travellers using winery. Meanwhile areas of improvements could be identified. We can take actions to make wineries sustainable yet effective promotional tools/sites for Australia's wine industry.

2.3 Motivations, preferences and barriers

Wine tourists want more from their wine destination experience than just to purchase wines. They desire quality offerings; attractions, including cultural, recreational, retail choices; and a rural, wine region landscape to enjoy (Brown et al., 2006; Bruwer & Alant, 2009; Cohen & Ben-Nun, 2009; Dawson et al., 2011; Galloway et al., 2008; Getz & Brown, 2006; Christou & Nella, 2010a, 2010b; Park et al., 2008; Martins, 2016). Charters (2006, p. 214) also suggested that wine tourists seek an experience that 'is a complex interaction of natural setting, wine, food, cultural, and historical inputs and above all the people who service them'. Positive winery experience has significant impact to brand equity building, which can positively influence wine tourists' further visit intentions via satisfaction (Nella & Christou, 2014a).

The expanding body of literature related to wine tourists' is still evolving and mostly take an explorative approach. Segmentation studies on characteristics and preferences of different markets were observed (e.g. Alonso, Fraser, & Cohen, 2007; Galloway et al., 2008). For example, Nella and Christou (2014b) investigated how sociodemographic variables, wine tourists' lifestyle and involvement with wine can influence their motivation, patterns, and evaluation on the wine tourism experience. Qing and Hu (2016) studies Chinese consumers' preference for red wine attributes and found that the country of origin is the most important factors that influence Chinese consumers' willingness to pay. In addition, taste of wine and organic production were also important attributes. Pechlaner and Volgger (2016)'s study to a group of Chinese wine tourists in Italy concluded that most

Chinese visitors at Italy wineries are business travellers who belong to middle class. Most of them took organized tours because they have limited time and language barriers. Joining a wine tour is more like a status consumption and it is important to have Chinese food in the tours. With the popularity of Australia as an outbound destination, more Chinese visitors started to explore further travel options in Australia and increasing interest on food and wine tourism has been observed (Sparks, 2007). However, there is still limit research attention to look into the preferences, motivations and barriers of Chinese wine tourists in Australia. The current study aims to fill in this gap using an exploratory approach.

3 RESEARCH DESIGN

The study uses a qualitative research design with in-depths interviews of Chinese wine tourists in Australia. Qualitative research is an inductive approach that is popularly used in studies with less available information. It takes an open and explorative approach with the aim to discover patterns and or theories (Bryman & Bell, 2003). Due to the scarcity of literature on wine tourism, particularly for Chinese visitors' experience in Australia, a qualitative approach is considered an appropriate starting point.

In-depth interviewing is a qualitative research technique which involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents (Boyce & Neale, 2006). In-depth interviews aim to explore people's perception, thoughts and attitudes on a particular issue. It is particularly useful to explore new issues in depth because it can offer a more complete picture of the issue being explore with a smaller number of participants (Patton & Cochran 2002).

3.1 Data collection

Researchers generally agree that saturation should determine the sample size needed for in-depth interviews (Baker & Edwards, 2016). In-depths interviews were conducted to collect data. Each interview lasted between 45 minutes to one hour. Questions regarding motivations, preferences and barriers of participating in Australia wine tourism were asked. Given the low percentage of winery tours among Chinese visitors to Australia, a snowball sampling method was used to gain access to potential participants. In total, 12 in-depth interviews were conducted in June 2015. All participants have visited at least one Australian winery for the past 12 months.

A research assistant was hired to conduct in-depth interviews and all interviews were conducted in Chinese. The interviewer was trained with professional interview skills. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. This created a qualitative data set to be analysed to investigate Chinese visitors' experiences with Australian wineries.

3.2 Data analysis

A systematic process of coding was performed guided by three major themes, motivations, preferences and barriers, to

analyse data. Open coding was used as the initial phase of coding the data collected. Axial coding embarks on the next step of grouping like-answers together to further consolidate the information and selective coding combines the data one step further into major themes, discerning the key findings from the dataset into usable information.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 depicts the profile of the participants. Majority of participants (75%) were female. More than half (58%) participants were between 29-39 years old; 25% were between 18-28; and 17% were between 40-55. 50% of participants reported to drink wine on social occasions, while the other 25% of participants drink for work purposes, on the other hand, another 25% of participants would enjoy wine alone. When participants were asked for their perceived top-three wine production regions, the most frequently mentioned regions are Europe (40%), Australia (37%) and America (13%). In terms of wine preference, more than 58% participants considered red wine as their first choice, followed by sparkling wine (33.3%) and white wine (8%). When asked preferred travel arrangement to visit a winery, 58% participants preferred to visit an Australian winery by joining a tour while the rest favoured to make free independent arrangements.

Table1: Profile of Participants (N=12)

| Aspects | Frequency (Percentage) |
|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Gender | |
| Male | 3 (25%) |
| Female | 9 (75%) |
| Age Group | |
| 18-28 | 3 (25%) |
| 29-39 | 7 (58%) |
| 40-55 | 2 (17%) |
| Drinking Habit | |
| Social Purpose | 6 (50%) |
| Work Purpose | 3 (25%) |
| Drink Alone | 3 (25%) |
| Wine Preference by Regions | (Top Three Choices) |
| China | 1 (3%) |
| Europe | 12 (40%) |
| America (North & South) | 4 (13%) |
| Australia | 11 (37%) |
| New Zealand | 2 (6.7%) |
| Africa | 0 (0%) |
| Wine Preference by Colour | (First Choice) |
| Red Wine | 7 (58.3%) |
| Sparkling Wine | 4 (33.3%) |
| (Champagne) | 1 (8%) |
| White Wine | |
| Preferred Travel Styles | |
| Own Arrangement | 5 (41.7%) |
| Join a Tour | 7 (58.3%) |

4.1 Preferences of wine

Table 1 also shows that majority (58.3%) of the participants indicated red wine as their most preferred wine type. A number of reasons were raised to explain the main reasoning of this preference: 1. A large variety of red wines are available in the market with various price points ranging from

budget-friendly to high-end. The ease of purchasing and availability of great selection resulted in the popularity of red wine, especially at events and banquets; 2. The red wine's full-body texture is another main reason, as a great number of participants reported their preferences for wines with good taste and strong fragrance; 3. The wine's compatibility with food was another concern. Many participants regarded the red wine to have a great tendency to match with many food dishes. They are therefore become necessity at many special occasions to complement a wide range of cuisine; 4. The fourth main reason for Chinese consumers to choose red wine over other wine types was its great benefits for health and beauty (Baxter, 2008; Qiu et al., 2013). Many Chinese people believed a regular red wine intake can provide a range of health-related benefits, both physically and mentally. For example, some said drinking wine may reduce the risk of depression, reduce the rate of bowel tumors, while others reported red wine has anti-aging properties (Draeos et al., 2007). 5. In relation to the local culture, the colour of the wine also contribute to its popularity as red is deemed to be a lucky colour representing happiness and good fortune. 6. Lastly, a number of participants mentioned drinking red wine is also associated with a better social image in Chinese society. The red wine drinkers are regarded as elegant, upscale and have good taste and higher social status.

Sparkling wine was the 2nd most popular wine and more than 33% of participants indicated it as their first choice. The main reasons for this preference were: 1. They prefer the sweeter and light body taste compared to the bitter and dry notes from other wine types. Some also mentioned the freshness taste accompanied by the bubbles; 2. It is a popular celebrating drink for many special occasions; 3. Given its light taste, it is a preferred wine type for many female drinkers.

In comparison to these two mainstream wine types, the white wine was the least popular with only 10% participants choose chose it as the preferred wine. Main reasons mentioned by the participants were its light body and fragrant, and the least amount of tanning.

4.2 Major motivations for participants in wine tourism

The following table (Table 2) summarises major motivations for Chinese visitors to participate in a winery visit experience. A total of four dominant themes are extracted from the interview responses. First of all, a lot of Chinese visitors wanted to visit a winery due to their curiosities. One participant has heard about Australia being famous for producing various kinds of wine, so he/she mentioned "Wine is an important industry for Australia, the country is famous for producing a lot of different types of wine, so we wanted to see how the wine are produced". A few other interviewees commented that they were curious to taste different kinds of wines, it would be a fun experience for them. Further, some other participants mentioned they want to learn more about the wine culture and the production process, one of the typical quotation example is "The wine is a symbol of culture, I was curious to learn more about the western culture. I was also interested to know the history of wine, and how they are produced". The second major motivation was friends. Some said they visited a specific winery because of local friends' recommendations – "My

friends recommended the O'Riellys winery while driving through Mount Tamborine, so we went for a visit". A few others commented that they had friends who also wanted to visit the winery, so they went together as they prefer to have friends accompany. The uniqueness of the winery visit experience was the third motivation. In particular, one said "It's not common for me to have a winery visit experience at where I was grown up (HK), so I would love to have the opportunity to experience something different and broaden my eyesight". For another participant, he/she just simply enjoy the relaxing environment at wineries – "I love the environment and scenery at wineries, it is quite relaxing, feels like I'm in another world". The final minor motivation relates to pre-arranged itinerary. Some interviewees mentioned that the winery visit was part of the itinerary of the package, so they went for the visit.

Table2: Major motivations for participants

| Theme | Coding | Quotation examples |
|------------------------|----------------------------------|---|
| Pre-arranged itinerary | Part of the package tour | The winery visit was part of the itinerary of the package tour, so we went. |
| | Friends recommendations | We had friends who also wanted to check out that winery, so we went together. |
| | Friends accompany | My friends recommended the O'Riellys winery while driving through Mount Tamborine, so we went for a visit. |
| Curiosity | To see the famous wineries | Wine is an important industry for Australia, the country is famous for producing a lot of different types of wine, so we wanted to see how the wine are produced. |
| | To taste different kinds of wine | The wine is a symbol of culture, I was curious to learn more about the western culture. I was also interested to know the history of wine, and how they are produced. |
| | To learn the wine culture | I was curious to taste different kinds of wine, it's fun. |
| | To see how wine are produced | It's not common for me to have a winery visit experience at where I was grown up (HK), so I would love to have the opportunity to experience something different and broaden my eyesight. |
| Uniqueness | Relaxing environment of winery | I love the environment and scenery at wineries, it is quite relaxing, feel like I'm in another world. |
| | Different experiences | |

4.3 Major barriers for wine tourism participation

The following table (Table 3) summarised the major barriers that prevent Chinese tourists visiting wineries in Australia. A total of eight barriers were identified, including Cost, Language, Service Attitude, Accessibility, Limited Wine Knowledge Covered, Food, Lack of entertainment and Lack of Culture Attraction.

First, a few participants were concerned with the cost associated with the tour. They were not able to justify the high cost involved in the overseas travelling. For example, one said "For Chinese live in the mainland, it might seem to be quite a high-end experience to visit Australian wineries. The costs associated with the overseas tour are generally quite high." To them, the domestic wineries would be perceived to have much higher value than the overseas ones. On the other hand, one participant said, "some wineries charge additional fee for wine tasting", this surcharge is not considered acceptable for this participant.

The second major barrier relates to the language. Depending on what type of tour they were on, the language barrier can cause slightly different results. One discussed about travelling in groups and commented "The pace of the

interpretation should be carefully controlled, otherwise it would be hard for visitors to grasp the wine knowledge, meanwhile, at least on staff member need to be able to communicate with the visitor's mother language, either mandarin or Cantonese". On the other hand, some other participants raised this barrier as FIT (Fully Independent Traveller) tourists. One mentioned "I previous visit a couple of wineries with daughter when he (she) had to rely on the daughter's rough translations throughout the whole trip." It was therefore not a satisfying experience as the participant would wished to have a Chinese guide to introduce more detailed knowledge about the wine culture and the winery.

Table3: Major barriers for participating in wine tourism

| | |
|---|--|
| Barrier 1: Cost | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participant 2: "I will see what it is. If wine tourism is what I have been wishing to participate, I would not mind spending money on it.....because I purchased wine, ate their and there were other expenses too, it was quite expensive" Participant 3: "For Chinese live in the mainland, it might seem to be quite a high-end experience to visit Australian wineries. However, the costs associated with the overseas tour are generally quite high... Situation is changing now as there are both expensive and cheap wines available in market. Going to local wineries in China would not cost a lot but a winery tour overseas is quite expensive" Participant 11: "For Chinese live in the mainland, it might seem to be quite a high-end experience to visit Australian wineries. However, the costs associated with the overseas tour are generally quite high. For travellers from Mainland China, going to Australia and join a winery tour can help them gain face among their peers because the cost associated the trip is high.....There are actually local wineries in China and the costs are quite reasonable" Participant 7: "We asked why there was no wine tasting in our tour and he said you need to pay for it... Yes, and it is quite expensive, so we did not have wine tasting experience but only sight-seeing" Participant 1: "Discounts for purchasing wines" Participant 7: "I probably would buy if there was introduction as well as discount" |
| Barrier 2: Language Barriers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participant 3: "The pace of the interpretation should be carefully controlled, otherwise it would be hard for visitors to grasp the wine knowledge, meanwhile, at least on staff member need to be able to communicate with the visitor's mother language, either mandarin or Cantonese" Participant 10: "I previous visit a couple of wineries with my daughter when I had to rely on my daughter's rough translations throughout the whole trip.....it would be much better if they have a Chinese interpreter during the tour. I think it is extremely important. Language barriers make it hard for me to evaluate my overall experience" Participant 11: "For language barriers, our generation is OK but our parents would feel bored if the whole winery trip was in English." |
| Barrier 3: Service Attitude | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participant 1: "Service staffs were not very helpful. There were so many types of wine and I do not know which one to choose, which one tastes better.....so I would hope to have some recommendations of wine, let us have a try.....save time" Participant 7: "The staff at the winery tend to focus on promoting famous types of wine at the cellar for sale, very limited knowledge about wine making and the differences between various types of wine were introduced during the tour.....also there was no supporting service to purchase wines, for example shipping wines to China as there is a limitation each travellers could take back to China." Participant 3: "Service staffs must show RESPECT, although tourists may from less developed countries, they should equally respect guests regardless their countries of origin.....they should be friendly too just as friendly as hotel employees, be more proactive and interact with customers" |
| Barrier 4: Accessibility | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participant 4: "Because most wineries are far away (from major attractions)....." Participant 9: "Because wineries are often located at the middle of nowhere..... Yes, it is boring" |
| Barrier 5: Limited Wine Knowledge Covered | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participant 7: "Wine tasting and wine production..... this basic knowledge about wine..... we would like to more since we always been there (to make the best of the trip.....but we did not get that at all" Participant 9: "Eh..... he did not cover or just very briefly talked about..... so I still did not know which one to buy. No one helped me" Participant 11: "If I have an idea, which is if the wineries have tutorial or seminar about the winery, about the basic wine knowledge, wine tasting, etc., I think that would be pretty good. That will add culture elements to the winery tour..... the one who introduced to us mainly covered information about the winery but did not touch much wine knowledge..... I visited there by myself, I am not sure if package tour would cover more content" Participant 12: "Almost all are about sales and promotion..... a famous brand of wine or a wine from certain years..... they tend to push people to buy. Knowledge covered were very basic, such as this wine is dry, that one is light..... without explaining what is dry and what is light feels like..... lack of basic wine knowledge introduction" |
| Barrier 6: Food | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participant 11: "Yes, so I think for Chinese tourists' join a 10-day tour in Australia, they could tolerate 4-5 days of western food. For people, particularly senior citizens, they used to eat Chinese food, and they would not feel comfortable to eat western food..... However, wineries should still mainly have western style food as Chinese food might not be a good match with wines..... Inappropriate match would be a disaster" Participant 1: "Food? My last visit was a winery in Brisbane. I was hungry and bought a pizza. It was disgusting and expensive" |
| Barrier 7: Lack of entertainment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participant 9: "Because wineries are often located at the middle of nowhere..... yes boring" Participant 9: "Yes, if you stay 2 nights in wineries, and there was no other entertainment facilities, you would feel bored. However, I think 2 nights would be fine" |
| Barrier 8: Lack of Culture Attraction | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participant 12: "Although I been to wineries in Australia and Europe, that did not change my impression that best wines are from France... like I said, wine to me is symbol of culture and history. However, Australia is not a historical destination... Rather is famous of natural environment... Australian wineries should promote this image to make up (its lack of culture and history)" |

Further, another younger participant commented similarly about the language and said the barrier would only exist for the parents who does not speak the language. In relation to this barrier, a few participants commented further about the interpretations at winery. One said "The staffs at the winery tend to focus on promoting famous types of wine at the cellar for sale, very limited knowledge about wine making and the differences between various types of wine were introduced during the tour." One even suggested a potential solution for the interpretation issue – wineries organize on-site tutorials or seminars as part of the tour, it will emphasize the theme of the trip and facilitate a good learning experience for the visitors.

Another key barrier relates to the logistics of the winery tours. A few participants said the location of wineries tend to be located at rural areas that are not far from other major tourist attractions. Having to travel a long way for just one winery was raised as a major barrier. The itinerary was often deemed to be boring due to lack of other entertainment activities and facilities around wineries.

5 CONCLUSION

Using an exploratory qualitative approach, the study looked into Chinese wine tourists' preferences, motivations and barriers for participating in Australian wine tourism. The study reveals that red wine is still the most popular type of wine among Chinese visitors. Chinese tourists tend to believe the best wine is from France. Participants wine knowledge varied. Some has very limited knowledge about types of wine and wine tasting while others seem to have a good understanding about wine. Despite their wine knowledge levels, all participates wanted to know more about the wine production process and wine tasting knowledge.

The study also explored barriers for Chinese tourists' participation in wine tourism. One of the most frequently mentioned barriers is language barriers. This put greater requirement on the wine knowledge as well as language skills of tour guide. The implication for wineries is that they should have someone, ideally, who speaks fluent Chinese and also master wine production and wine tasting knowledge. Participants also raised the issue of respect, which implies a good understanding of Chinese traditional culture values, such as face (or Mian Zi) is also important. Accessibility of wineries seemed to be another prominent barrier. It is not only because that most wineries are far away from city centres, it was also because there are limited supporting facilities and activities surround wineries. This easily makes tourists feel bored. Some practical implications for wineries would be simply include more activities that tourists can participate. For example, given the strong interest of wine knowledge from this market, wineries could provide short seminars or workshop at the wineries to introduce basic knowledge about wine production, wine tasting and food and wine paring.

As an exploratory type of study, this study is limited by a small sample size due to the difficulty of accessing participants. However in-depth interviews reveal valuable information and saturation started to appear by the end of data collection process. Future research should consider including a larger sample and further explore the issue.

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SUBMITTED: SEP 2016

REVISION SUBMITTED: DEC 2016

ACCEPTED: JAN 2017

REFEREED ANONYMOUSLY

PUBLISHED ONLINE: 27 MARCH 2017